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CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

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Monthly Newsletter

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Kazakshtan

USAID Helps Educate Kazakhstani Citizens about their Judicial System

In April USAID's Kazakhstan Judicial Assistance Project launched the "Know Your Courts. Know Your Rights" national public education campaign. Together with 18 NGOs from around the country, the project will distribute 50,000 brochures in local languages with information on different aspects of the judicial system. The brochures will also be available for free in every court. A selection of educational articles will be printed in newspapers across the country, and public service announcements will run on national radio for five weeks. The entire set of materials is available on the websites of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Union of Advocates.



A public education campaign on the judiciary was launched at a press conference in Almaty. Photo: KJAP

Government and Businesses Discuss Ways to Improve Kazakhstan's Competitiveness

In April two USAID's projects, the Regional Competitiveness Initiative and the Kazakhstan Small Business Development Project, organized an Economic Growth and Competitiveness Forum. At the event government and business representatives discussed actions to be taken by the public and private sectors to further economic growth as Kazakhstan seeks to become one of the world's 50 most competitive countries in the world. According to the 2006 World Economic Forum Competitiveness Index, Kazakhstan ranks 56 out of 125 countries. The forum resolved to focus on improving innovation, health, education, judicial independence, as well as business sophistication and efficiency. This will not only improve the country's ranking, but will create new jobs and opportunities as well as better quality of life for Kazakhstan's citizens.



The competitiveness conference was opened by the country's Prime Minister Karim Massimov. Photo: KSBD

Kazakhstan Participates in the First GEM Study in Central Asia

This year Kazakhstan joins over 40 middle and high income countries worldwide as a site of the prestigious Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) survey of entrepreneurial activity. The survey was brought to the country by the USAID Kazakhstan Small Business Development Project. The project facilitated selection of the Innovative Eurasia University of Pavlodar as an entity that will carry out the survey in Kazakhstan as well as supported other preparatory work. The survey measures and compares entrepreneurial activity among the participating countries and develops policy recommendations to improve the environment for entrepreneurs in each country. The survey is expected to be completed by February 2008, and will provide direction on the Kazakh Government's policy decisions for the ongoing development of the country's small and medium business sector.



USAID's project supported the participation of Kazakhstani representatives at GEM pre-survey briefings in London. Photo: KSBD



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

New Institution to Improve Court-Media Relations

The USAID Kazakhstan Judicial Assistance Project recently helped to create the “Bench-Media Forum of Kazakhstan” to facilitate continued dialogue among the members of the country’s judiciary and the media. Bench-Media Forum is used in many countries worldwide as a tool to improve relationships between the two institutions, so that the judiciary and the media enjoy an open and productive relationship. In this way, information can flow freely from the judiciary to the media and on to the public. The forum will meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual concern, with the overall goal of improving the quality and accuracy of reporting through increased communication and stronger relationships between the courts and the media. The first meeting was held in Almaty on April 24 and was attended by nearly 20 members of the judiciary and the media from the Almaty Region.



Improved relationships between the media and the judiciary will ensure more accurate and balanced reporting. Photo: USAID

Kyrgyzstan

\$200 Million Given in Loans by a USAID-supported Microfinance Program over Five Years

The Micro and Small Enterprise Finance Facility Program was established in Kyrgyzstan in 2002 by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development with support from USAID and other international organizations. Currently, the program’s gross loan portfolio exceeds \$85 million. About 30,000 businessmen are active loan recipients, and over 84,000 loans have been disbursed through 78 lending outlets. According to the program, disbursed loans have helped to create and sustain more than 100,000 jobs.



One of the 30,000 borrowers of the Micro and Small Enterprise Finance Facility Program. Photo: EBRD

USAID Project Eases Tensions over Water and Improves Information Exchange in Jalalabat Oblast

On April 25, the USAID Collaborative Development Initiative, implemented by Mercy Corps, celebrated the completed rehabilitation of irrigation water system in Kyzyljyldyz Village, Nookan District, Jalalabat Oblast. For several years, lack of irrigation water significantly decreased yields from the farmland and has been causing tension among the residents of Kyzyljyldyz and neighboring villages. The USAID project helped Kyzyljyldyz villagers rehabilitate the transformer, pump, and well system, thus allowing for adequate irrigation water for the entire area. The improved irrigation capacity will help at least 44 local households to increase their incomes. It is estimated that the improvement will result in 1.5 times larger yields and will enable local farmers to shift from traditional crops to more profitable ones, such as tomatoes and cucumbers.



Kyzyljyldyz residents expect that the rehabilitated water system will help to increase their harvests. Photo: Mercy Corps

Meanwhile in Jalalabat City the USAID project helped create an information center for the Jalalabat City Bazaar, an important venue for all economic activities of the city and the neighboring villages. The information center will broadcast local news and will serve as an intermediary between buyers and sellers, producers and processors, as well as between the population and local government. It is expected that this initiative will improve community relations, knowledge and resource dissemination, and



Mercy Corps, city administration, and a local media center signed an agreement to support the information center. Photo: Mercy Corps



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

opportunities for development of small and medium businesses in the region. The two initiatives were designed by local economic development councils, organized by the USAID project. The project helps to set up such councils in clusters of neighboring villages and towns across southern Kyrgyzstan to empower community initiatives and supports these groups with training and small grants for infrastructure improvements.

USAID-funded Program Introduces Law and Democracy to Kyrgyz Islamic Schools

In the fall of 2007, the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative (ABA/ROLI) is planning to expand its USAID-funded Street Law Madrassa Program to additional Islamic schools across Kyrgyzstan. Currently the program operates in three male madrassas, three female madrassas in southern Kyrgyzstan, and at the Kara-Balta Institute in northern Kyrgyzstan. This USAID-funded program has evolved from a successful Street Law program in the secular schools, which has been operating in Kyrgyzstan since 2001. The program uses interactive training methods to engage over 5000 secondary school on issues of law, democracy, and human rights.



The Street Law Program is currently taught at three Islamic schools for women in Kyrgyzstan. Photo: ABA/ROLI

USAID Continues Supporting Decentralization Reform

A Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and USAID gave the green light in April to continue the USAID Decentralization and Local Government Program in the Kyrgyz Republic. The USAID program will continue to assist with decentralization and intergovernmental fiscal reforms, strengthening of local government capacity, promotion of transparency and accountability of local government operations, and improving citizens' participation in local decision-making. The program will also support the Kyrgyz Government in further implementation of the National Strategy on Decentralization of State Governance and Local-Self Government Development, and help inform the public about local government reform efforts. The USAID program has been working with local governments since 1999. The program is implemented by the Urban Institute and currently cooperates with all 25 cities of the country and 136 rural municipalities.



The U.S. Ambassador for Kyrgyzstan and a local government representative at one of the project events. Photo: Urban Institute

Tajikistan

USAID Helps Tajik Women Regain Possession of Their Land

Thanks to support from USAID, in February 100 women from the Saodat Farm in northern Tajikistan regained possession of 19 hectares of irrigated land that had been taken from them illegally several years ago. This case has set an important precedent in Tajikistan for the security of land tenure and was widely publicized by local mass media. The women, mostly widows, had received this land from the Government in 2000. However, a well-connected member of the local community took possession of the farm shortly after irrigation was installed on it. Even though courts repeatedly ruled in the women's favor, the decisions were never executed. USAID-funded legal experts supported the women's legal representation and followed the case throughout the process. Thanks to their persistence, the land was finally returned.



One of the members of Saodat farm testifies how her land rights were taken away illegally. Photo: Chemonics



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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

Humanitarian Assistance Reaches Villages after a Natural Disaster

During the months of March and April there were two significant natural disasters in the Rasht Valley, an avalanche in the district of Jirgatal which affected 43 households and a massive landslide in the district of Boqi Rahimzoda which affected 24 households. In partnership with humanitarian and local government agencies set up for emergencies, USAID contributed by supplying each family with one bag (50 kg) of lentils and vegetable seeds for planting, distributed by Mercy Corps.

USAID Supports Drug Demand Reduction among Labor Migrants

The USAID-funded Drug Demand Reduction Program (DDRP) and its implementing partner – the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation – has produced a labor migrant guide for people migrating to Russia. The guide aims to reduce drug demand and prevent HIV/AIDS among Tajikistan's labor migrants. According to the International Organization for Migration, some 600,000 labor migrants work outside the country. The guide was developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection representatives, psychologists, drug treatment professionals, specialists of the country's Drug Control Agency, and lawyers. Sixty-three thousand copies of the booklet will be distributed through local and international organizations working with migrants. The guide contains information on the health and social consequences of drug use, pertinent sections of the Russian Federation migration law, description of traditions, customs, and norms of the host country, as well as other practical details of importance to migrants, such as contact numbers for Tajik Embassy and specialized organizations working with migrants.

USAID Supports Preparation of Family Medicine Trainers

In May eight medical professionals graduated from an 11-month Train the Trainer course at the Family Medicine Training Center of the Post Graduate Medical Institute, supported by the USAID ZdravPlus project. The institute operates at the Dushanbe City Health Center #1, a long-term ZdravPlus partner in family medicine programs. The new graduates will teach a six-month family medicine retraining course for medical professionals at different training bases, such as Tajik State Medical University, Post Graduate Medical Institutes in Dushanbe and Khujand, Republican Family Medicine Training Center, and the Dushanbe City Family Medicine Center. They will also contribute to sustaining continued medical education in the Sughd Region, Dushanbe, and other neighboring districts.

Young Entrepreneurs Showcase their Business Skills

On May 22 Junior Achievement together with the local Committee on Youth, Sport, and Tourism and the Sughd Regional Department of Education organized a "Young Entrepreneurs Fair - 2007" in Khujand. More than 200 school companies from nine cities and over 700 visitors participated in the fair. The event was the final stage of the Junior Achievement's Student Company Program, implemented at Tajikistan schools with USAID support. The



Women and children affected by landslide receive 50 kg of lentils and vegetable seeds. Photo: Mercy Corps



To reduce drug demand, USAID provides Tajik migrants with necessary guidance. Photo: DDRP



USAID's representative hands over the completion certificate to one of the graduates. Photo: ZdravPlus



At the fair students promoted and sold products and services of their school companies. Photo: Junior Achievement



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

program provides students with an opportunity to gain practical entrepreneurial skills. Students develop business plans, establish and run their own companies, participate in decision-making as stockholders or members of the Board of Directors, and earn wages or salaries from company activities. At the “Young Entrepreneurs Fair - 2007” student companies sold their goods and services to businessmen, representatives of mass and local authority, teachers, and parents. Student companies also competed in quality and positioning of their goods and services, creativity of advertisement, sales techniques, and customer service.

Turkmenistan

CDC and USAID Train Turkmen Specialists in Quality Assurance for Viral Hepatitis and HIV Laboratory Diagnostics

From May 18-21 twenty Turkmen laboratory specialists received a four-day training entitled “Quality Assurance and Quality Control for Viral Hepatitis and HIV Laboratory Diagnostics” in Ashgabat. The training was organized by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), with funding from USAID and in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan. It focused on improving laboratory diagnostics, since the control and prevention of HIV, viral hepatitis, and other infectious diseases depends largely on accurate quality control and quality assurance of laboratory diagnostics. The course taught proper installation and maintenance of laboratory equipment, sample management, and the principles of quality control and assessment. A post-training test showed that participants increased their knowledge by an average of 40%. This training is part of long-term USAID and CDC efforts to insure blood safety in Turkmenistan, in support of the country’s National STIs/HIV/AIDS Prevention Program. With funding from USAID, CDC is also providing this training in all five countries of Central Asia.



Laboratory specialists studied quality assurance and control system to improve diagnostics of hepatitis and HIV. Photo: USAID

Turkmen Health Specialists Learn from the U.S. Experience

In May, three key Turkmenistan counterparts for USAID blood safety and HIV/AIDS prevention programs visited the U.S. on a specialized HIV/AIDS study tour, organized by the U.S. Government’s International Visitor Leadership Program. The Turkmen delegation consisted of the directors of the National Blood Center and the National Center on HIV/AIDS Prevention, as well as the Senior Health Specialist from the Cabinet of Ministers. Participants learned about the HIV programs in the U.S. and discussed possible future activities in Turkmenistan under the USAID HIV/AIDS prevention programs. The three-week tour has made a positive impact on improving international between the two countries in the area of HIV/AIDS surveillance and control.



During their tour, Turkmen doctors discussed medical practices at a number of health clinics in the U.S. Photo: USAID

Meanwhile, ten Turkmen gynecologists and neonatologists returned from their three-week U.S. study tour on reproductive health. This tour was sponsored by USAID’s Community Connection program. The Turkmen doctors visited 30 health care sites in West Virginia. Participants will brief the Minister of Health and his deputies on what they have learned and its application in Turkmenistan.



Junior Achievement Programs Increase Student's Economics and Management Skills

Over 450 students comprising 57 teams from 33 educational institutions in Lebap, Mary, and Balkan provinces took part in a Management and Economic Simulation Exercise (MESE) tournament, organized by Junior Achievement with support from USAID. The tournament began at the province level and culminated with a state-level competition of the winning teams on April 21. MESE is one of the Junior Achievement programs that provide students with skills of managing a commercial company in the free market setting. Junior Achievement programs in Turkmenistan have been approved by the Ministry of Education as an official elective course and are the only available course on market economics available to the country's students. From 2004-2007, sixty-two high school teachers throughout the country have been trained by the program on computer-based MESE modeling, which was used in this tournament.



Junior Achievement programs teach young Turkmenistanis business and economic skills.
Photo: Junior Achievement

Uzbekistan

USAID Supports Human Development in Economic Sector of Uzbekistan

An award ceremony on May 1 completed the fifth annual Young Economist Contest for university students. The contest is organized by the Center for Economic Research (CER) and the Economic Review Magazine to foster knowledge-based economic and human development in the country. The event also contributes to training qualified economists capable of developing better economic policies in the country. Approximately 150 individuals from 62 universities participated in the event. Since 2002, the USAID Economic Policy Reform Project has been supporting the event by donating prizes for winners.



Winners of the Young Economist Contest.
Photo: Junior Achievement

Food for Peace Program Helps 20,000 in Uzbekistan

On May 7, USAID participated in a press conference to mark the delivery of 75 metric tons of fortified dehydrated soup produced by Breedlove International to Uzbekistan. The shipment, valued at over \$150,000, is part of the Food for Peace Program. USAID partnered with CitiHope International and the Uzbek NGO Soglom Avlod Uchun to deliver soup to orphanages, TB hospitals, retirement homes, mental institutions and prisons, providing 20,000 people in 10 regions of Uzbekistan with six months worth of nutritious meals. This is was the third humanitarian shipment of food delivered to Uzbekistan.



At the press conference beneficiaries shared their success stories from the previous deliveries. Photo: USAID